

My thanks to Gill & Keith Walker, Ken Hill, Jeremy Dagley and other Epping Forest staff for observations and information, to John Muggleton, Roger Hawkins and Ulf Buchsbaum for providing references and to these and several other coleopterists for their advice and opinions.— PAUL R MABBOTT, 49 Endowood Road, Millhouses, Sheffield S7 2LY.

**Some autumn and winter observations of *Halyzia sedecimguttata* (L.) (Col.: Coccinellidae) with notes on a concentration of wintering ladybirds**

On 24 October 1999 a concentration of ladybirds was discovered gathered upon fence posts along the margin of a small secondary wood near Whittlesford, Cambridgeshire. Present among them were at least 25 examples of the Orange Ladybird *Halyzia sedecimguttata*. The posts were beneath overhanging Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, a tree favoured by this species. Other familiar ladybirds were also present, notably large numbers of Sixteen-spot *Micraspis sedecimpunctata* (L.).

A return visit was made to the site on 6 February 2000, in an effort to arrive at a clear estimate of the number of wintering ladybirds present. The insects were found to be utilising some 400 metres of (mostly) wooden posts of varying diameter, and almost without exception were facing between north-east and south (the sides facing the wood). This observation parallels previous records reported by Adrian Fowles (Majerus, 1994. *Ladybirds*. New Naturalist's Series, HarperCollins, pp. 93-94). Fowles' interpretation, endorsed by Majerus, is that the ladybirds are taking up positions sheltered from prevailing south-west winds.

There were indications that wood which had been treated with timber preservative, as some of the larger posts had been, were unpopular. On this occasion only eight *H. sedecimguttata* were located. Most of these were on the posts themselves, either in exposed positions (but usually in company with other coccinellids), or in sheltered crevices, with one on the underside of a fence wire; one individual was active.

By far the most numerous species present was *M. sedecimpunctata*: extrapolating from a series of counts and estimates suggested that a total in excess of 50,000 were utilising the fence posts and the grass and other vegetation at their bases; it is likely that more were using this latter habitat than could be observed. Large aggregations of *M. sedecimpunctata* is not unusual – this species habitually forming large overwintering aggregations (Majerus *op. cit.*). Also present were 20 Seven-spots *Coccinella septempunctata* (L.) in a variety of locations and positions, just one Two-spot *Adalia bipunctata* (L.), and a single Kidney-spot *Chilocorus renipustulatus* (L.) active on a fence in the wood itself.

On 16 January 2000, a single *H. sedecimguttata* was discovered wintering inside a telephone box, of the modern open design, at Bricket Wood, Hertfordshire, a semi-natural woodland locality where the species has previously been recorded. The individual had adopted an inverted position against the roof of the box, similar to that employed by this and other ladybirds when utilising natural wintering sites on the underside of tree branches. It may be speculated that the insect had originally been attracted by the light, as moths often are to this and other public telephones.

This suggestion is supported by previous records of ladybirds attracted to moth traps (Majerus, 1990. *Ladybirds at light. Bull. Amat. Ent. Soc.*, **49**: 197-199). Majerus notes that *Halyzia sedecimguttata* is more strongly attracted to light than other British ladybirds. I am grateful to Dr Mike Majerus for his helpful comments, via the Editor, on the initial draft of this note.— C. M. EVERETT, Wolfson College, Cambridge CB3 9BB.

### The ladybird as a twinkle in the eye of an angel

The Orange Ladybird *Halyzia sedecimguttata* (L.) was once regarded as rather uncommon and, although it is now known to be quite widespread, it is nevertheless a handsome insect and not one to be come across every day. It is a striking yellowish orange, with pale creamy white spots and has a strange transparent rim at the sides and front of the thorax, extending out over the head.

Fowler (1889. *The Coleoptera of the British Islands* **3**: 166) and Joy (1932. *A practical handbook of British beetles*, p. 522) both describe the Orange Ladybird as "local", unusual for a ladybird since most species are very common and widespread. A tentative list of scarcity statuses put about by Hyman (1985. *A provisional review of the status of British Coleoptera*. Invertebrate Site Register Report **60**: NCC), suggested that it might even be considered as nationally scarce (Notable B, i.e., recorded from between 31 and 100 of the ten-kilometre squares of the National Grid). However, during the 1980s, *Halyzia* seems to have been recorded more often. Provisional Notable status was not confirmed when the final review of scarce and threatened beetles was produced by Hyman and Parsons (1992. *A review of the scarce and threatened Coleoptera of Great Britain*. UK Nature Conservation **3**: JNCC).

There is no doubt that some of this increased recording was due to the fact that a specific association with sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* trees was first noticed at this time. The Orange Ladybird is a mildew (mould) feeder, rather than an aphid predator, and sycamores seem to be particularly prone to mildew on their leaves. Once this fact was known the ladybird was much more often recorded.

The Orange Ladybird's over-wintering habits are usually described as in leaf litter, on tree trunks or in ivy clumps, especially near sycamores (Majerus, 1994. *Ladybirds*. New naturalist **81**: Harper Collins), and although small aggregations of over-wintering Orange Ladybirds are recorded they are not frequent. I was intrigued, therefore, to find several specimens huddled together on various gravestones and, in particular, on a stone angel, a delicately carved and gently lichen-encrusted Victorian headstone, in Nunhead Cemetery, south London, on 1 January 2000.

Six of them, together with a specimen of the Pine Ladybird *Exochomus quadripustulatus* (L.) were snuggled together in the angel's hairline, others were resting under her ear and on her neck, and one was tucked into her eye socket.

Ladybirds are steeped in myth and metaphor. From signs of good luck to omens of imminent matrimony, from the gardener's friend to the child's delight, these pretty beetles are welcomed and celebrated by all. But has anyone ever thought to describe a ladybird as a twinkle in the eye of an angel?— RICHARD A. JONES, 135 Friern Road, East Dulwich, London SE22 0AZ.